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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY	Czechoslovakia	REPORT NO.		50X1
SUBJECT	1. Political Opinions and Reactions to Western Propaganda	DATE DISTR.	29 April 1955	
	2. Reflections of Religious and Economic Policies	NO. OF PAGES	7	
DATE OF INFO.		REQUIREMENT NO.		50X1
PLACE ACQUIRED		REFERENCES		50X1

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THE APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.
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NOTE: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "#".

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COUNTRY Czechoslovakia

DATE DISTR. 9 Mar. 1955

SUBJECT 1. Political Opinions and Reactions to Western
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2. Reflections of Religious and Economic Policies

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THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION

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Political Opinions

1. [redacted] workers in [redacted] factory, [redacted] not more than 20% [redacted] were supporters of the Communist régime, and perhaps fewer. [redacted] the currency reform dealt an almost fatal blow to the prestige and popularity of the Party. A few members had formerly at least believed in the promises made by Zapotocky and the other leaders. Now not even Party members put any stock in the régime's assurances that everything would be better. In short, the public had little confidence that the "new course" would result in any significant improvement in living standards or in political conditions.
2. It was not possible to take a sampling of the political views of one's casual acquaintances or of strangers in one's town, but it was still fairly easy to discuss political topics when travelling on trains. [redacted] E 18-00) to [redacted] the vast majority of the Czechoslovak people were bitterly opposed to the régime.
3. One way in which workers showed their views within the factory was by refraining from making pledges for increased output. [redacted] at MEZ Vsetin at the end of 1953 or early in 1954, a trade-union meeting of about 100 workers in [redacted] the factory was opened with the reading of a speech by the Minister of Domestic Trade promising increased supplies of textiles, etc. When the chairman called upon someone to make a pledge to raise output, two or three workers stood up in turn and talked vaguely about meeting

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- 2 -

norms, the problem of defective production, etc., but not one worker mentioned an increase in output. The unspoken resolve of the workers not to meet the Party's wishes was so apparent [redacted] that the meeting was soon adjourned without the pledges having been given. Subsequently, however, Party functionaires approached the workers individually and extracted the desired promises to produce more.

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4. [redacted] relations between Czechs and Slovaks were about the same as they were before 1948. [redacted] there was a great psychological gulf between the two groups. Their mentalities and their histories were different enough to make it almost inevitable that they should dislike each other. [redacted] the Czechs were mostly to blame for the ill-feeling. In some respects, the hard times faced by both groups have accentuated their differences. Czechs who visited Slovakia still believed, as during the war, that when a Slovak clerk said an item was not in stock, this only meant that it was being saved for a Slovak customer. On the basis of fairly extensive contacts with Slovaks in Komarno, [redacted] most Slovaks had always been, and were still, "autonomists". They might concede that the Czech connection was to some degree necessary; but, at heart, almost all Slovaks were separatists to some degree.

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5. [redacted] Slovak attitudes toward the Slovak political groups in exile. Some months ago, [redacted] a broadcast by Peroutka on Radio Free Europe to the effect that a rehabilitation of the memory of Msgr. Tiso was needed. There would doubtless be many Czechs who would disagree with this, but [redacted] something of the sort was necessary. Regarding Czech attitudes toward the émigré political leaders, [redacted] most people regarded such leaders as Zenkl, Majer, and Ripka as their true representatives -- somewhat in the same way as Beneš and Masaryk had been regarded during the second world war. In general, judging from Czech and Slovak newspapers published in Germany and elsewhere [redacted] the reputations of these exiled leaders were higher within Czechoslovakia than they are abroad.

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5. [redacted] it was widely believed that Gottwald had been killed with some kind of fatal injection.

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Opinions on "Operation Veto" Leaflet Action

[redacted] only a few leaflets had fallen around Pilsen [redacted]

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- 3 -

8. The only information [redacted] on the measures taken by the authorities to prevent circulation of the leaflets [redacted] learned from RFE broadcasts. [redacted] a lukewarm Communist Party member [redacted] once volunteered the advice that [redacted] destroy it without showing it to anyone, since one could be severely punished for allowing others to read such matter. Inasmuch as this advice was given shortly after the non-Communists in the office had been shown the leaflets mentioned above, it is possible that the acquaintance knew the leaflets had been passed around, though nothing was said to reveal such knowledge [redacted]. The acquaintance did not go into detail as to what was the normal punishment for possessing or distributing leaflets. [redacted]

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9. The popular reaction to the leaflet operations was favorable. [redacted] workers [redacted] did not give much thought to the individual points in the ten demands, but agreed that the demands were well formulated. [redacted] the balloon action was generally regarded as a useful addition to the radio broadcasts in maintaining opposition to the régime.

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-1. [redacted] the effort to persuade people to write or paste the number "10" on public walls was a mistake. Police controls were so severe that it was really not practicable for anti-Communists to risk doing this. The result was that they did not do it, and consequently the prestige of the West in Czechoslovakia and the anti-Communist opposition there was to some extent weakened. The only anti-Communist inscriptions [redacted] were written in toilets in trains and in factories, and these inscriptions always appeared to be of an individual and spontaneous nature owing little or nothing to organized oppositional campaigns. The usefulness of even such inscriptions was limited, however, as the authorities took considerable care to have toilet walls washed quite frequently. In the workers' toilets at the shipyards in Komarno in 1952, the management finally tired of removing such inscriptions from the doors and decided to remove the doors instead, leaving no suitable surface for the opposition to use as a blackboard.

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Foreign Radio Broadcasts

12. [redacted] a regular listener to the Czech-language programs of the VOA, RFE, and the BBC. [redacted] had much free time in the evenings and usually listened to these stations an hour or more a day. [redacted] listened to the BBC from 2015 to 2030 Central European time, to VOA from 2100 to 2130, and to RFE from 2130 to 2200 hours. Jamming was troublesome but [redacted] found an audible transmission somewhere in the short-wave band. Medium-wave transmissions were impossible. [redacted] never listened to Czech-language

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- 4 -

broadcasts from Moscow, and only rarely to the news broadcasts of Radio Prague. [redacted] depended almost entirely on these foreign stations for news of the world.

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13. [redacted] praised the Martin Cermak broadcasts of VOA on Sundays. [redacted] liked some of the economic broadcasts of the Western stations, but was not interested in the programs for workers or peasants. [redacted] enjoyed programs on military topics. [redacted] a faithful listener to Peroutka's RFE broadcasts, and pretty much agreed with everything Peroutka said.

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[redacted] Peroutka's political position had been [redacted] correct. [redacted] praised the broadcasts of Basta and Hostovsky. [redacted] always listened to the Pegasiada program of RFE on Thursdays.

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14. [redacted] some educated people who liked particularly the cultural programs of Radio Paris [redacted] listened to Paris, Belgrade, Rome, and Madrid only occasionally [redacted] Some people

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thought that BBC was somewhat more objective than any other stations, but there was little difference in the public attitudes toward the news broadcasts of RFE, BBC, and the VOA. One could say that, in general, there was nothing about any of the Western stations which people in Czechoslovakia disliked. The only possible criticism he could think of in this connection was a remark some people had made about RFE's comments on the currency reform. Some of RFE's remarks on the subject were taken to mean that RFE thought it had known that the currency reform was coming. This irritated people who were pretty certain that, even if RFE had known the change was contemplated, RFE had not known just when the change would be made. These people thought that it would have been better if RFE had frankly admitted that it had been taken by surprise with regard to the timing of the reform.

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5. [redacted] a majority of the adults still listened to foreign broadcasts at least occasionally [redacted] People who were interested in politics listened to foreign news broadcasts at least as often as they listened to domestic news broadcasts. They tuned in the latter only out of curiosity to learn what would be the latest Communist lie about the news.

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6. In general, fewer people listened to foreign broadcasts now than during the war. At that time, people followed the news because they knew that every battle affected the time they would have to wait for liberation. Now, however, people had much less interest in the news because there seemed to be no prospect that the Communists would be overthrown. As an example of this changed attitude toward the news, source cited the case of an anti-Communist colleague in his factory who gave up listening to foreign broadcasts because he no longer saw much point in trying to pick up the foreign stations, when he could just as easily rely on source's accounts of what VOA, RFE, or the BBC had broadcast the evening before. Some people also stopped or cut down on their listening because of the jamming. The wife of another [redacted] colleague had formerly kept the radio tuned in to RFE all day long. When jamming spoiled the programs, she stopped listening and only tuned in for an occasional broadcast, preferring also to depend on the news which her husband picked up [redacted] also [redacted] friends [redacted] stopped listening to Western stations because they feared if they did so their ten-year-old child might inadvertently give them away at school.

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- 5 -

Religion

17. [redacted] generally optimistic about the religious situation in Czechoslovakia. [redacted] church marriages were increasing and [redacted] more people went to church now than a few years ago. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] 50X1
[redacted] 50X1
18. The experiences of [redacted] a nun, illustrated Communist religious policy. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] 50X1
[redacted] Around 1949 or 1950, the convent at Nove Zamky in Slovakia, to which she then belonged, was closed by the Communists. Some of the nuns were allowed to do welfare work in old people's homes, sanatoria, etc.; but most of them [redacted] were obliged to take work in a textile factory in Frantiskov u Decina in northwestern Bohemia. None was allowed to continue in the teaching profession, or to give religious instruction [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] None of the nuns abandoned her religious life. The nuns at the factory lived together in their own section of a workers' dormitory. They wore the garb of their order insofar as possible and followed the same routine of early morning prayers, evening prayers, and other such rituals common to most religious orders. Their Mother Superior was arrested several years ago, but the nuns secretly selected one of their number to replace her. The nuns were apparently paid somewhat less than the other workers in the factory. In accordance with their vows of poverty, they turned over all of the money they earned to one of their number who acted as treasurer for the group. 50X1
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19. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] sometime in the last year or so an unknown priest visited the nuns claiming to be their vicar, apparently on instructions from the Communists. The sisters refused to recognize him, but he managed to give them one lecture by appearing uninvited at one of their evening prayer meetings. He invited them to attend a course at a school near Decin (N 50-47, E 14-13) where they could improve their skills as textile operators. Five or six of the nuns [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] agreed to attend the course. They found that, in addition to the technical courses, there were Communist political lectures and other group activities at the school designed to weaken their religious faith, but they apparently resisted the indoctrination efforts of their embarrassingly friendly Communist teachers. Thus, when one of the instructors called on the nuns to sing some songs in connection with the approaching May Day holiday, the nuns sang religious songs instead. The Communists evidently gave up this effort to win over the women, because no other groups of nuns were invited to attend the course. 50X1
20. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] relations between Catholics and Protestants were little changed from before the Communist coup. 50X1
- Comments on the Pretended Shift from Producers' to Consumers' Goods 50X1
21. [redacted] there were no signs at all of any shift from producers' to consumers' goods. In the last few years practically all of MEZ Vsetin's output consisted of producers' goods. When the so-called "new course" was introduced, the expansion of output was curtailed, and various measures were taken to operate the factory more economically, but absolutely nothing was done in the direction of shifting over to consumers' goods.

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- 6 -

22. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] There was a large Zbrojovka armaments factory in Vsetin 50X1
which had made sewing machines, milking machines, and other such 50X1
consumers' goods from 1945 to 1948. After the Communist seizure of 50X1
power, the plant had been put to work making anti-aircraft cannon
and machine guns instead. In 1954, there was talk that investments
at Zbrojovka were being cut just as they had been cut at MEZ Vsetin,
and that no new employees were being taken on, but nothing more. 50X1
[redacted] as of September 1954 the 50X1
machines or milking machines.
23. The only fact remotely suggesting a shift to consumers' 50X1
goods was that in the summer of 1954 [redacted] able to buy some good-
quality gabardine suit cloth which appeared to have been manufactured
originally for officers' uniforms.
24. [redacted] there had been no shift to consumers' 50X1
goods, except in the form of propaganda, and that output of such
goods was probably no higher now than a year ago. The well stocked
appearance of shops was caused by the people's inability to buy what
was on sale, rather than by an actual increase in the production of
consumers' goods. Indeed, even though prices were very high and the 50X1
people very poor, there were some goods which were still in short
supply. [redacted] to buy a motorcycle in 1954
had to wait four months before the local distributor could make one
available. 50X1
- Agricultural Developments 50X1
25. An announcement was made on the MEZ Vsetin factory loudspeaker system 50X1
sometime at the end of 1953 or early in 1954 that the government had
ordered that anyone who wished to leave industry to work in agriculture 50X1
should be allowed to do so. [redacted] only two MEZ Vsetin
employees [redacted] asked to leave, but doubtless there were others 50X1
[redacted] One was a photographer, aged about 40, in charge of
the blueprints section at the factory. His salary at MEZ had been
about 1,200 crowns per month. He signed up in the summer of 1954
to become a shepherd on a collective farm at Prunerov u Kadane
(N 50-25, E 13-16). He had no agricultural skills but had been
promised 1,400 crowns per month and a house. He had already in-
spected the house before he signed up to transfer. In the end, he
finally stayed on at MEZ Vsetin when the factory gave him a pay
raise. Had he gone to his new house, he would not have been able
to live in it anyway. The authorities who had allotted it to him
explained that, although there was plenty of money set aside to pay
for putting it in order, the nationalized firm responsible for doing
the repair work had too few bricklayers. As a result, new arrivals
had to live in a dormitory for many months before the houses could
be made ready.
26. The other applicant for agricultural work became a tractor driver 50X1
somewhere. [redacted] this
individual had tuberculosis and perhaps thought that housing and 50X1
work conditions would be better elsewhere.
27. [redacted] 50X1
[redacted] the new back-to-land movement had been a 50X1
failure. Agricultural work, particularly on collective farms, was
still harder and more disagreeable than factory work. [redacted] a 50X1
girl from a cooperative near Vsetin [redacted] chose to work as a char-
woman in a factory in Vsetin for only about 400 crowns per month
rather than return to the land. 50X1

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